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Initiation of the comprehensive review and appraisal of the implementation of the Platform for Action and preparation for the special session of the General Assembly in the year 2000

Letter dated 25 February 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you the report of the European Conference on Follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action,* held at Madrid on 23 and 24 November 1998 (see annex).

The Conference took place under the Austrian Presidency and was organized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of Spain through the Women's Institute with the collaboration of the European Commission.

Ministers and representatives of each of the member States of the European Union and of other countries of Central and Eastern Europe as well as the European Economic Area, all of whom are responsible for policies on equal opportunity for women, participated in the Conference. The meeting analysed the following priority areas in the Platform for Action: education, violence against women, the economy and employment, and power and decision-making. The participants in the Conference adopted a joint communication on violence against women, which is included in this report.

I should be grateful if the text of this letter and its annex were circulated as an official document of the forty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women in connection with agenda item 4.

(Signed) Inocencio F. Arias

* The report is circulated in the languages of submission only



Annex

[Original: English and Spanish]

**European Conference on Follow-up to the Beijing Platform
for Action, held at Madrid on 23 and 24 November 1998**

During the Spanish Presidency of the European Union the *IV World Conference of the United Nations on Women* was held in September 1995. This was a Conference which established pledges and specific measures in order to obtain equal opportunities between men and women, an issue which is fundamental for the development of society as a whole.

In this conference there was a general consensus to hold follow up regional meetings of the Platform for Action.

Conscious of the situation of women and their growing role in all areas of economic and social life and their valuable contribution to the construction of today's society, Spain proposed to host a European Conference for the follow up of the Platform for Action.

On the 23 and 24 of November 1998, under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency, the European Conference for the follow up of the Platform for Action of Peking was held with the aim of evaluating the fulfilment of pledges undertaken at the IV World Conference on Women in Peking.

The Ministry of Work and Social Affairs, represented by the Woman's Institute with the collaboration of the European Commission was in charge of organisation.

Conference Participants

Ministers and/or Representatives of each one of the member states of the E.U. and of other countries of Central and Eastern Europe and of the European Economic Space who have responsibility in equal opportunity policies for women, Members and observers of the Consulting Committee on equal opportunities, representatives of the European Commission, international organisms, social agents, NGOs, Autonomous Communities, the governing council of the Woman's Institute, Members of the Mixed Commission on the Rights of Women in the Spanish Parliament etc.

In the European Conference the Member States carried out a review of the following areas of the Platform :

1. Education
2. Violence against women
3. Economy and employment
4. Power and decision making.

Its objectives were :

1. To gather together actions that have been carried out so far by the Member States to fulfil the objectives in the stated areas of the Platform for Action.
2. To present proposals for actions to be carried out in each one of the four areas until the year 2000 on behalf of the member States.
3. To make Joint Communication of the 15 members of the European Union on violence towards women.

This conference was conducted by three panels corresponding to the areas already mentioned. These were made up of five speakers, one for each member State, who referred to the actions taken up to then in their country relevant to the subject of their panel and their proposals for actions to be taken until the year 2000.

In its conclusions it underlined that one of the areas where most progress had been made was *employment*, which has undoubtedly been aided by the inclusion of a specific pillar for equal opportunities in the European Union's guidelines for employment for 1998. Also to be highlighted is the concerted effort of the Member States to incorporate equal opportunities for men and women in a cross sectional way in the rest of the pillars on employment and to gain a knowledge of the real situation of women in the workplace through studies divided by gender.

With regard to *Education*, the importance was underlined of acting on non-discriminatory educational practices, establishing the foundations of a new gender culture which in the future will permit a more equal relationship between men and women.

With reference to the participation of men and women in the *power processes and decision-making* it should be pointed out the Member States' determination to follow through the platform using different channels such as the quota system or the training of women which gives them access to decision making posts and areas where they are under-represented.

The efforts of the Member States to combat *violence against women* have been centred fundamentally on legislation, preventative measures, help and support to victims.

At the end of each panel's participation a debate was held with the objective of promoting the exchange of experience and the presentation of proposals by the other Conference participants.

We would like to underline the importance that this first Regional Conference has been celebrated in Madrid, taking into account, on the one hand, that Spain held the Presidency of the European Union during the IV World Conference on Women in Peking and, on the other hand, the level of commitment and involvement of the Woman's Institute to work for equal opportunities between men and women so that it may be a reality in the near future.

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS ON EDUCATION

The report presented by Luxembourg underlines the actions taken to bring about a change of values in the pre-school years. Girls and boys from 4 to 6 usually receive stereotyped values regarding gender and in their adult life when they begin work they are confronted with an environment which is markedly male in its characteristics. By acting on educational practices in those early years it is hoped that a new foundation for gender culture is laid which will then be further developed in the long term.

As well as these initiatives in the classroom, teachers are also targeted for continuous training, as are the parents through diverse activities in order to create a new gender culture, promoting equality between individuals and the development of each person's talents.

The Project, developed by the Ministry for the Promotion of Women, promotes education for Equality in various ways :

- a) in the education of teaching staff, which includes the peculiarities of men and women
- b) in the training of union educators
- c) in the area of business management with the introduction of a delegate for equal opportunities.
- d) equal opportunities as an element in local politics
- e) in the academic curriculum
- f) Many actors may take part in this project of integration of a new gender culture, giving rise to a network of participants who have a multiplying effect. This project needs funding.

THE PANEL' CONCLUSIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

I shall begin by stating the most significant points highlighted by the representatives of the five countries invited to discuss violence and will end with a brief synthesis of the main areas of agreement. I will focus on the countries' presentations of four fundamental issues :

1. Legislation passed in the different countries in fulfilment of the objectives of the Platform for Action in Peking.
2. Preventative Measures, assistance and support to victims of violence.
3. Good practice chosen as the most significant from those presented by each country.
4. And, lastly, proposed recommendations for the future.

DENMARK

1. In the Legislative Plane, the legislative modification penalizing prostitution of the under 18s and proposals to toughen up on soliciting can be highlighted.
2. As far as measures adopted to relieve the problem of violence and its victims are concerned, 33 help centres have been established for women and 2 for men and local advice centres for victims have also been set up.
3. As good practice we can point out the "mechanism of the instant alarm-call" for women who are seriously threatened by another person.
4. With reference to the numerous recommendations suggested by Denmark there is an obvious need for help centres to be linked to public hospitals and to offer an all comprehensive help, medical and legal and the creation of a Central Documentation Centre.

The need is also apparent to take necessary measures to combat the traffic of women in all its complexity given its links to organised crime.

THE NETHERLANDS

The government in Netherlands is preparing an Interdepartmental Plan of Action to prevent and combat violence against women.

1. With reference to Legislation the law of Child Pornography, passed in 1996, with the reform of the Penal Code, increasing prison sentences for the circulation of sexual images of children under 16 stands out.

With regard to measures taken, the holding in 1997 at The Hague of the Conference of Ministers of the European Union stands out. The Conference resulted in The Hague ministerial declaration on effective measures to prevent and combat the trafficking of women for their sexual exploitation can be highlighted. In this Declaration there was a recommendation that countries establish a control system based on national rapporteurs. The Declaration emphasises the need to combat this problem in a multi-disciplinary way co-ordinating all the different actors involved: the NGOs, judges, doctors, lawyers and authorities who have powers in immigration on a national and international level.

3. As Good Practice the measures adopted by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science in the Netherlands in order to prevent violence in schools with its document "Safe Schools" deserves to be mentioned.
4. Of the recommendations proposed by the Netherlands the adoption of an optional Protocol to the Convention of the United Nations for the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women can be highlighted.

PORTUGAL

In fulfilment of what was agreed in the Platform for Action in Peking, in 1997 Portugal approved the Global Plan for Equal Opportunities whose objective 2 deals with the Prevention of Violence and the need to guarantee adequate protection of women from the same.

- 1 and 2 - In the Plan preventative measures are proposed, such as public opinion campaigns or the publication of a Guide on the rights of women who are victims of violence replacing previous publications. It also proposes protective measures such as the setting up of support Centres for victims, direct help, information and telephone lines and also specific training for the police forces.
3. As good practice it should be pointed out the legal interpretation of the present Law made by the General Attorney of the Republic opening up the way for the denial of access to the aggressor to the home.
4. Of those recommendations put forward by Portugal the following can be highlighted: psychological support for victims, the need to work with the aggressors, the importance of the participation in television programmes as a way of informing public opinion and of spreading the knowledge of existing services and the the advisability of tackling the problem in an integral and integrated way.

UNITED KINGDOM

The Government in the United Kingdom will publish in the spring of 1999 a document which outlines the guide lines for the protection and the increase in safety of all women.

This document will highlight good practices, the need for the promotion and co-ordination of work of all those groups, organisms and institutions involved in the problem and the elaboration of a Practical Measures Programme.

1. As far as Legislation is concerned the passing of the Family Law Act on 1 October 1997 can be highlighted. This reforms the law regarding Domestic Violence and improves the protection of all types of victims in all types of violence and family relations including ex-wives, couples living together where there is no legal tie and a wide range of relatives. This Act deals with measures relating to home occupation and denial of access to the aggressor to the shared residence.

Another notable piece of legislation is the Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 which considers domestic violence in its local aspect, putting forward a new way of relating to the police.

Other recent Legislation passed by the British government which could be highlighted is the Sex Offenders Act of 1997 which establishes a register of all those who have been sexual offenders allowing the police to monitor the whereabouts of these people. This Act increases prison sentences for sexual crimes which means that those people who have committed a crime typified as sexual may be subject to a period of supervision of up to ten years after serving sentence.

3. As good practice taken up by the United Kingdom the following can be pointed out : the "Speaking up for Justice" report, published in June 1998, which includes diverse measures for the help of intimidated or vulnerable witnesses, or the possibility of cases of rape or serious sexual crimes being tried behind closed doors or with videos and closed circuit television.
4. Recommendations to be highlighted are those relative to the improvement of the safety of women in the workplace which are proposed in the Tavistock Report of 1997 and those concerning the improvement of women's safety in public transport.

SWEDEN

With the aim of combating violence against women the Swedish Government has presented its Plan of Action this year. This Plan proposes the following measures :

1. With respect to Legislation two great reforms have been undertaken :
 - The inclusion of a new offence relating to domestic violence with increased prison sentences which permits an appreciation of the global situation of women who have suffered abuse.
 - And, on the other hand, the penalization of the purchase of any type of sexual service with prison sentences of up to six months.
2. Measures to be highlighted are the creation of a Parliamentary Law Commission on sexual crimes and the elaboration of statistics and research, the study on the treatments given to men sentenced for sexual crimes are of particular interest as are the training and education campaigns directed at those people linked to victims or at certain professionals such as doctors, teachers, social workers, etc. and the success of the National Centre for raped and abused women set up in 1994.

3. As good practice we would like to point out the economic support given to organisations of men campaigning against violence, so underlying the importance of preventative work.
4. In its recommendations the Swedish Government makes clear that the problem of violence against women needs a holistic or integrated approach with the elaboration of plans of action which involve all sectors of society.

To sum up, let us take a brief look at the main issues that the different presentations have focused on.

1. The need to adapt legislation

- Increase in prison sentences, especially of those crimes relating to children.
- Typify the offence of the trafficking of human beings.
- Create a specific legislation for domestic violence, which is understood not just as sexual, with measures which include the denial of access to the home to the aggressor.

2. There is also consensus on the value of the contribution of the NGOs and the need to co-ordinate work with them.

3. The advisability of adopting an integrated approach to the problem has been highlighted, integrating the work of institutions at a national and international level.

4. The need is also clear for attention to the culture and behaviour of men through studies, treatment centres and campaigns which involve them.

5. Co-ordination between the member states of the E.U. is necessary in both the area of statistics which should refer to all types of violence and the exchange of good practices or the collaboration of Eastern European countries to prevent the traffic of women and girls.

6. The importance of public opinion and information campaigns has been pointed out highlighting the transcendence of making the media responsible. The growing importance of computer technology also has to be taken account of in this field and the importance of work in schools and with those who are in contact with victims.

7. Lastly, it is important to emphasise the difficulty in assessing results. With the notable exception of Denmark, that although having noted the difficulty of such evaluations, has underlined that the decrease in both rape and domestic violence is a direct result of the setting up of help centres and greater independence achieved by women. Let us hope this may continue.

In any case we can conclude by stating that violence against women is framed in a culture of respect towards the human being and the promotion of Human Rights.

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS ON ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

The presentation on Economy and Employment will be divided into three parts :

The first is a summary of what the representatives of the participating countries said. The second is a reflection of the productive discussion that was held afterwards in which many people took part. The third part will be a commentary on topics which could have been proposed or discussed but did not, however, come up in yesterday's session.

Beginning with the Austrian representative's contribution it could be summed up by saying that although the general level of unemployment in Austria is low, women's access to employment is also low. In the new jobs that are being created a high number of them, especially those taken by women, are part time. There is a great disparity between men and women as regards employment and unemployment. As far as Institutions which are involved in these areas those of territorial decentralisation stand out. Numerous activities are the responsibility of the Landers. Another important aspect is that in Austria women work as much inside the home as outside, which puts up an obstacle for the improvement of their position within Austrian society because of the build up of the total load of work.

The Belgian representative made a very systematic presentation of the type of actions and measures with which attempts are being made to improve work conditions for women. The aim is to try to combine work and family through positive actions and to obtain continuity in measures in the long term or in the changes in the social fabric with all these measures becoming well entrenched in society. In order to achieve this, there is collaboration between the different levels of power, at local and state level and with the different social agents. Attempts for change in two specific fields were also pointed out : that of initiatives for the care of the sick in their own homes, a task which falls fundamentally on women and which has great importance with regard to their chances of employment and also specific programmes to combat harassment in the workplace.

The Greek representative concentrated fundamentally on the preconditions for access to employment. As with other representatives who concentrated on the description of what is the nature of employment, Greece's report put the accent on what needs to be changed so that access to employment is possible. It was pointed out that *"what does not even aspire to be employment cannot be considered as unemployment and therefore will not give rise to political plans for incorporation into employment"*. Apart from describing conditions such as flexibility, part time, unemployment and access to jobs etc. , the role of women in the Welfare State was also looked at and it was concluded that if Greek women are to be incorporated into the workplace then the Welfare State must be reinforced. If they are not given some help in taking on a job then they will never be fully incorporated in the workplace. Negotiating risks of difficult solution were also pinpointed and a series of measures, especially of guidance were outlined, which were

termed as of value but of limited scope. The last criterion for employment policies should be to create employment, but not any employment and without knowing at the cost of what. Not just employment for employment's sake, but employment under certain conditions.

The Irish representative's report concentrated on the harmonizing of roles within the home and outside the home. A detailed description was given of the measures which have been taken, of special importance in a country like Ireland which has undergone enormous change. It is one of the European countries with a greater rate of change and economic growth and with more women entering the work force and, therefore, the transition has arrived before the measures can be put into effect in order to resolve the problems of more women working with child care. The presentation ended with a description of the new institutions created for the promotion of women and for their incorporation into the economy.

The Spanish representative's report began by pointing out the important role of the decentralised organisms of the Autonomous Communities. Two points were then dealt with. The first is how to interpret the changes which have taken place (as was graphically illustrated, *"a bottle can be seen as half full or half empty; we all have to decide if the changes desired to be seen are with the relative satisfaction that the bottle is full or with the undertaking that it is half empty"*). The second point to be considered is a series of interesting changes that are taking place in Spain. One of them is the combat the idea that women are a drain on businesses. To achieve this a series of measures is being introduced, perhaps the most important is that, in the case of maternity leave it is Social Security who takes on the costs of substitution as far as Social Security payments are concerned. It was also pointed out that the State assumes 60% of the business quota if women are employed in sectors which are traditionally male bastions and where it is necessary to change the stereotype that women cannot work there. Finally, reference was made to the Equality Plans, especially to the Plan for Equality in employment, formulated to enable the incorporation of more women in the work place. Other actions aimed at incorporating rural women and women in positions of responsibility were also discussed.

In the follow up discussion which was highly productive many points were debated, impossible to sum them all up here. I will just include a small selection of them. For example, the proposals that men be made indicators of change: most work carried out by organisms for equality is focused on changes in women, but if we live together, then changes in the attitudes and practices of men should be measured in all that which is relative to women which is almost everything. It was also proposed that social and political objectives should be quantified, with specific amounts, proportions and dates. Other contributions referred to the quality of employment. There was a special mention made of rural women who are in a highly unfavourable situation because of the non-recognition of spouses as workers, and because they are not considered as "other workers" or as "owners" of their holdings.

Finally, we could include in the topics that were not discussed and probably would have been if there had been more time ; the issue of taxes (which was mentioned very briefly at the opening and not in discussion), the way in which taxes affect women : not enough work has been done on the type of taxation on families which can make a considerable difference to the real wages of women to the extent that employment may hold little incentive. Another issue is real and not only legal access to the European Funds. Also important is the issue of the benefits derived from the access of women to the infrastructure, since countries spend enormous amounts of money on this (for example, water, electricity or the transport system). Another important issue for women is the analysis of unpaid work, access to consumption, ownership and pensions.

THE PANEL'S CONCLUSIONS ON POWER AND DECISION MAKING

The report presented by Germany highlights the increase of women in political representation, of their presence in government at both federal level and the federal states. But in other areas, such as university professorship and top management they are under represented.

The pressure of the NGOs and the Council of German Women has increased the minimum quota to 40%.

As an application of the constitutional mandate on equal rights, the Government has determined specific aims, such as :

- a) A figure in charge of women's rights in Public Administration
- b) The distribution of family responsibilities
- c) Parity in positions of responsibility

The speaker points out that resistance still remains, that long term habits must be established, that women must be disposed to take up positions of responsibility and the support of their families must be forthcoming.

The representative from Finland mentions that her country is the third with the greatest representation of women in politics: 34% in Parliament and a third in Government. At a local level 50% of County Councils are made up of women and Helsinki's Council is led by women.

The 40% quota has been aided in all areas of political power by historical factors, the right to vote since 1906 and the characteristics of the Electoral Law. The Action Plan for Equality makes each ministry responsible for its proposals. Parameters have been set up to measure equality and the wide acceptance of women's involvement in politics has been proven.

Women, who are under 50, are better trained, however only 10% are in top managerial posts and there are still differences in incomes. A Law for Equality is considering plans in the work place and pacts on domestic work. The political will exists but it will take time before differences are reduced.

France's report highlights as a practical case the project for constitutional review in order to include parity. There is a paradox in that the Declaration of Rights proclaimed universality in 1789, the vote for women was established in 1944, the 1958 Constitution recognised equal rights, but only 9.2% of Parliament are women.

From the nineteen eighties there has been a debate on equality and the demand for parity by women's organisations, in which political parties and, ultimately, the Government have become involved. In 1995 a Watchdog for Parity between Men and Women was formed and, currently, the priority is to modernise democracy with the political integration of women which requires adding to the text of the Constitution the guarantee of equal access to women allowing for positive action.

In Italy the increase of women involved in politics is also apparent although it is still lower than what it should be. The Government has been developing new projects in the areas of : employment, the family, violence and public administration. The situation has improved in the area of employment but in the distribution of domestic tasks there is still a large imbalance. Similarly, in the political arena there is still resistance to be met with. There are also difficulties in bringing about a review of the Constitution and for a change of the present Electoral Law owing to previous experiences and the peculiarity of the political party system. However, the key issue of the criteria for the election of candidates and the problems of their representation in the democratic system has been raised.

Currently great attention has been focused on Cultural Politics, with experimental projects in centres where non-Italian girls are being trained, attending the needs of a multi-cultural society and the education of adult women and their training in new technologies.

Finally, with the inclusion of all the different contributions of this panel it should be pointed out that the constitutional instruments are fundamental but must be reinterpreted in order to guarantee equal opportunities for women. The measures of Positive Action are essential and to be effective they need the support of society. Equality is not a natural fact, it must be constructed through parity. Statistical data is required on gender in all areas. We need a new way of looking at conditions and forms of work including political work and unpaid work. A deep cultural change is needed which will transform gender stereotypes for a new gender culture in order to face up to the new obstacles, like the glass roof, and the cultural diversity of our societies.

The strategic objectives of the Platform of Action of the Peking Conference still have a long road to travel before they are fully developed.

**JOINT COMMUNICATION OF THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE FOR THE
FOLLOW-UP TO BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION ON VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN**

We, the participants of the European Conference for the follow-up to the Platform for Action adopted by the IV United Nations World Conference on Women,

Gathered in Madrid in November 1998, the year of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,

Consider that the promotion and protection of human rights which are based on the value and dignity of humans beings, are priority objectives of the International Community,

Recognize that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace and both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Stress that violence against women is a violation of equality and their right to life, safety, freedom, dignity and physical and mental integrity and therefore an obstacle to their full development as persons,

Consider that violence against women means any act of gender-based violence, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. Accordingly violence against women encompasses but it is not limited to the following:

- a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the house-hold, dowry-related violence,

marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation;

b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs.

Underline that violence against women is evidence of the historically unequal power relations between men and women which have led to the prevention of the full advancement of women in social, economic, labour, cultural and political life,

Concerned by the effects that violence against women have on society and children and how it could influence future generations,

Recognize that the spirit of our time and current reality demand new ways of cooperation, commitment and relations between women and men which will build a more fair and equal society,

Affirm that it is necessary and achievable to promote human relationships free of violence against women at family, community and State level through an holistic and multidisciplinary approach,

Are well aware of the fact that violence against women in the European Union is widespread and persistent despite national and international legislation on equality between women and men,

Welcome the joint organization by the European Parliament and the European Commission of a european campaign to combat violence against women, and express our intention to join forces to work to eliminate this form of violation of human rights,

Welcome activities organized on November 25th as a Day of Action to combat violence against women.

Reaffirm our commitment to implement and reinforce the legal instruments and other measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence against women including its consequences in our respective countries, as well as undertaking joint efforts at European Union level, so that zero tolerance of violence against women is achieved at individual, collective and institutional level.
